



# ***COMMITTEE of the WHOLE***

## ***CITY COUNCIL***

**MINUTES**  
**May 19, 2008**  
**5:00 P.M.**  
**Council Office**

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

V. Spencer, S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, D. Sterner, M. Baez, S. Fuhs, J. Waltman

### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

A. Mukerji, K. Pick, C. Younger, S. Katzenmoyer, L. Kelleher, R. Hottenstein

Vaughn Spencer, President of Council, called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

### **I. Buttonwood Gateway Redevelopment Plan**

Mr. Mukerji reminded Council that the grand opening of Sun Rich Foods is May 20 at 4:30 pm.

Mr. Mukerji reported that this plan was adopted by Council in August 1998. He noted that Sun Rich Foods is operating, Hydrojet has committed to the location and a third business is being pursued. Mr. Mukerji noted that warehousing operations are not a good use for this property. The plan calls for businesses that will create new jobs. Sun Rich has committed to creating 265 new “walk to work” jobs and hiring from within the neighborhood.

Mr. Mukerji described the difficulty the Reading Redevelopment Authority and the Berks County Redevelopment Authority have had in acquiring existing homes within the plan area. He reminded Council that they have the option of using eminent domain to move the acquisitions forward in a timelier manner. He noted that the Planning Commission must declare these areas as blighted to move the process forward.

Mr. Pick noted that 67 properties remain as holdouts. Mr. Waltman reminded Mr. Mukerji and Mr. Pick that properties not demolished must be kept up to code.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that those living in this area are the very low income and poverty stricken. Mr. Waltman noted some residents have lived in their homes for 40 years and are reluctant to relocate. He noted the difficulty that relocation will have on some residents.

Mr. Mukerji noted the quality of life issues that exist in these properties. Mr. Waltman noted that some of these issues are caused by redevelopment properties not being properly maintained.

Mr. Mukerji noted that in order to accelerate the redevelopment process, the City must control the land.

Mr. Waltman questioned if there was a timeline. Mr. Mukerji repeated that the timeline will be greatly shorter with Council's assistance and no further holdouts. Mr. Mukerji explained the eminent domain process.

Mr. Pick reported that the ADD program's friendly sales nets 4-5 sales per year. He noted that it would take an additional 20 years to acquire the properties at this rate.

Mr. Marmarou relayed the scare tactics sometimes used during eminent domain proceedings. He expressed his hope that no scare tactics would be used.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to work on the psychological issues of the residents to help them visualize the benefits of relocating.

Mr. Spencer noted that he has been on both sides of the eminent domain issue. He noted the delicate situation the City is in as it tries to increase its tax base.

Mr. Sterner noted the feeling of the holdouts that they will receive payments exceeding the value of their homes. He noted that overpayment is unlikely. He reminded Council that eminent domain can fast track this project. He stated his hope that the proper process would be followed and that affected residents would be educated in the process.

Mr. Mukerji informed Council of his belief that the properties in question may fall on their own as the truck traffic increases in this neighborhood. Mr. Waltman noted his opposition to the truck traffic and noted that other more appropriate locations exist for this type of operation in the City.

This issue will be further discussed at a future meeting. Codes and Solid Waste will also be invited to attend.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk